

A RED PAGE OF LIFE.

PERSECUTED RUSSIAN IN SYDNEY.

A Terrible Story.

Left for Dead in the Siberian Snows

There is a red page of history in every village in Russia. Most Russians who have lived through the turmoils of that great country have infamous deeds burnt into their brains or emblazoned on their backs by the keen cuts of the knout. The few leaves torn from the life of Thomas Wolkowski, a Russian now in Sydney, read more like a chapter from one of Hugh Conway's books. They are old forms of literature; but old forms of barbarism still exist in Russia, and though the siren of the steam-engine shrieks across the snow-carpeted plains of Siberia—the red trail of blood is still there.

Wolkowski was a school-teacher in a village in Little Russia, one of the provinces verging on the Crimea. It was a small district church school under the control of the priests, who are the supervisors and inspectors.

The parson dropped in one sunny afternoon to examine the children in Biblical subjects, and, finding a small, golden-haired girl somewhat backward in her knowledge of the saints and the use of holy ikons, dealt out blows on her body with a thick ruler, and then with a final lash across the head split the unfortunate child's ear from the top to the bottom.

"That's the way to bring them up to the mark," snorted the Little Father, turning to Wolkowski.

"I do not agree with your method of punishment," said the teacher.

"Tut! Tut!" said the Little Father in as-

"Tut! Tut!" said the Little Father in astonishment, for to remonstrate with a Russian priest is to commit a sacrilege, and to court punishment. "That is the only way to get obedience out of children."

The young school-teacher had the temerity to quote a passage from Tolstoi regarding the treatment of children.

"Enough!" roared the Little Father. "If you mention the name of Tolstoi in this school you are not fit to have charge of children."

"I will leave," said Wolkowski. "I cannot stay here and see children treated in such a way." And the school-teacher packed up his trunk and went back to his native village. His gentle methods of imparting instruction were not in demand in Russia.

The days were not bright in the little village. Wolkowski was a strong, lusty fellow with ideas and a desire to see the world and he heard the cry of Siberia, which was then being opened up for commerce and traffic. He went there with the hope of achieving a fortune. For a few months Russia was in one of its periodic moments of placidity. No village had been wiped off the map by Order of the Czar's generals; and no Government murders had been committed for at least three months. Russia appeared to be on the right way to reform. Siberia was depicted as a working man's paradise. Wolkowski made for Archinsk. There he learned telegraphy, and after some training, being a man of considerable aptitude, he attained the position of chief operator, with six men under him, at a station on the great Siberian railway line.

"My bad luck pursued me," said Wolkowski in relating the story of his life. "A strike occurred among the men right along the railway. This was in 1905, when the Russians were at war with the Japanese. Only military trains were passed, but no passenger or commercial trains were allowed to go through."

Wolkowski was in his office one day, when a message commenced to come through. It was a manifesto, and started off: "Everyone is free!" Then came an announcement with regard to the Douma, and a promise of free speech, a free press, and freedom for everybody if the strike would only cease. The railway men went to Peirowsky-Zawod and

railway men went to Peirowsky-Zawod and held a meeting. It was suggested that the men should finish the strike and join the social democratic party, and fight for a position in the Douma. Half the men were afraid that the Government would cheat them, and were not in favor of returning to work. However, every man went back to his job.

WRITTEN IN BLOOD.

"The red page of my life commences here," said Wolkowski, with a far-away look in his eye. "I was standing on the station platform when I overheard two conductors talking about a mysterious general who was travelling along the railway line shooting and hanging every person he came across."

"I don't believe it," said the telegraph operator thrusting himself upon the railway men. "Can you name one man who has been killed?"

"Yes," said one of the men. "An official at Taishat was shot the other day, and the general also hanged the priest at that place

because he protested against the soldiers beating the people. They took the priest along the platform and strung him up to the signalling semaphore. Then again, at Elanskaya, the general sent some spies ahead of him, and they told the people that they were delegates from the strike committee at St. Petersburg, and asked them all to attend a meeting at the railway. Nearly everybody in the town attended. In the midst of the meeting the mysterious general arrived, and ordered the troops to shoot or sabre everyone. They started operations. Someone shut off the electric light. Afterwards the bodies of 50 men, women, and children were picked up. Some were dead. Others had their arms or hands and feet hacked off."

"The massacre would have been terrible," said the other conductor, "if the lights had not been shut off."

The conductors mounted their trains and went off.

Wolkowski was loth to believe the story; but he communicated it to the secretary of the strike committee, who called a meeting and told the people not to be afraid of the rumors. There was no law which said that

rumors. There was no law which said that people could be shot down like dogs without a trial.

The people believed him. They went back to work.

Three days later Wolkowski was sitting in his office, and received a telegram saying that three trains, marked A, B, and C were going to the front with field telegraph and soldiers, and that all trains in front must





THE TELEGRAPH OPERATOR SEIZED BY SOLDIERS.

be stopped to give free way. Such a method of running the trains struck the telegraph operator as strange. Not even for the Grand Duke, when he went to the front, had the trains been stopped. He was uneasy. A few hours later a locomotive and a car with two soldiers and an officer came slowly into the station. Five minutes later two more trains loaded with soldiers arrived. They were armored trains, and the huge guns were pointed directly at the station. At a signal the men sprang up and turned their

rifles at those who were in proximity to the railway. These soldiers were under the direction of an official named Martinkewich, a fiend who was justly done to death some time afterwards at Tomsk. Strong arms of vengeance dragged him into the river and held him under the water until he was drowned. But that is another story.

Being the chief operator, Wolkowski had to accompany the stationmaster on to the platform to meet the train. Wolkowski was in uniform. Every other man you meet in Russia wears a uniform of some sort, and Wolkowski was no exception to the rule. Martinkewich with a number of soldiers came straight towards him.

"Is your name Woulkuffsky?" demanded the official.

"No," replied the telegraph operator.

"Then it may be Wolkowski?" he asked.

"Yes," said the telegraph operator. "That

"Yes," said the telegraph operator. "That is my name."

"Hands up!" roared Martinkewich, and instantly a score of guns were levelled at Wolkowski. Up went the unfortunate man's hands, and he glared at death down the barrels of the rifles.

"Search him," said the official.

"Show me all the revolutionary telegrams you have received."

"I have none," replied the telegraph operator.

"Don't lie to me—you dog," shouted the brutal official.

"I have none. I never had any," replied Wolkowski.

"Come here?" said the official, beckoning to a couple of soldiers. "Show him the knout, boys."

The two soldiers came over close to the now trembling telegraph operator and shook their villainous weapons in his face.

"Now, you dog of a revolutionary, out with every telegram, or they will show you how they use their lashes."

In vain Wolkowski protested that he had no telegrams.

"Write the name of every revolutionary that has been with you?"

"I know no revolutionaries," pleaded the man.

"Write! Write! Or you will be knouted."

The telegraph operator seized hold of a pencil and wrote every name he could remember having seen on the tombstones in the cemetery of his native village.

"Wrong! Why do you give me wrong names?" asked the official, snatching the paper away from him.

"Take him away, boys, and give him about fifty."

They dragged the unfortunate man off the platform, and having stripped him of his clothes they threw him down in the snow on the road outside the station. Two men sat on his legs and two others held his head down. Then two bazi-bazouks stood over him and their knouts commenced to fall like a flail.

Slash! Slash! Slash! They rained alternate blows on his back, raising wales from the neck down to the waist.

the neck down to the waist.

Blood commenced to flow down on to the white snow.

Wolkowski howled with pain. When thirty blows had fallen he lost consciousness; but not before he had set his arms free and laid them across his back. A few more blows and they fell away, paralysed.

Still the blows fell like rain. Fifty! Sixty! Seventy! Eighty!

Those who were looking on lost count. The body was listless, lying in a great pool of blood.

Martinkewich, who had been busy arresting another man, came on the scene, and, viewing the body of the man and thinking he was dead, shouted: "Enough! Don't waste your strength on dead meat!"

The soldiers left, one of them giving Wolkowski a parting kick on the ear, splitting it open.

DEATH BY DEGREES.

They left the body where it lay, naked on the snow.

They scented better game. There was blood in the air.

Six other telegraph operators were arrested and also a messenger boy. These they marched along the line, and fastening them to telegraph posts commenced target practice on them, firing first at their ankles, and shooting on until they reached their heads.

They died by degrees, riddled with lead.

Tortured to death, their bodies died a bit at a time.

The soldiers did not touch the stationmaster. When they had completed their fiendish work they mounted the trains again. The engines shrieked and the huge, lumbering vehicles rolled onwards to deal out death to some other unfortunates lower down the line.

The stationmaster went out and assisted Wolkowski to his room. He was still breathing; and a few hours later gained consciousness. He was in great agony, and was taken to the hospital at the next station; but the doctor was too frightened to admit him, fearing that Martinkewich might return. "Get off the railway line," he said.

Helpless and hopeless, Wolkowski started to drag his weary limbs into the great white country that stretches down towards China.

to drag his weary bones into the great white country that stretches down towards China, and after going a few miles met some friendly Mongolians, who mounted him on a horse and took him into Mongolia, and nursed him until he got better.

Hearing that Martinkewich had left that part of the country, Wolkowski returned to Russia. A friend sent him to Vladivostock, and he started work as a navvy on the railway. But his return to Russia had evidently got mooted abroad, and he was ordered to report himself every week to the police.

Hard times commenced to crowd upon him. For a time he worked as a reporter on various newspapers; but in less than two

years the Government closed eight newspapers that he was connected with. The editors were thrust into prison, and the reporters were thrown out on to the streets.

Ultimately life became so unbearable that Wolkowski made his way to Manchuria, and from there he slipped over to Japan. For the first time for many years he breathed the air of freedom in the land of the enemy of his country. From there he came to Australia.

Here another scourge awaited him. He had only escaped the red death of Russia to contract the white scourge of another country. Whilst working in the opal mines at Lightning Ridge he was attacked by consumption, and for some considerable time he was an inmate of Waterfall Hospital, whence he has been recently discharged, cured. He is now without friends, without a home, and without money.

To-day Wolkowski wanders about Sydney. In spite of its bloody traditions he is still anxious to get back to his own country. His relations are there, and he wishes to rejoin them. He is willing to work his way if he can secure a job on a ship.

Man (praising plain woman's appearance): "She is so neat and clever, and her expression alone makes her lovely." Jealous Spinster: "Why don't you lay claim to such an accomplished beauty?" Man: "What right have I to claim her?" Jealous Spinster: "Every right. By the law of nations, you're the first discoverer."

By the law of nations, you're the first discoverer."

Old Lady: "My little boy, do you smoke cigarettes?"
Kid: "No, mum, but I can give you a chew of tobacco."